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TAGS: ECON GM PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: GREEN PARTY LAUNCHES BID TO RETURN TO POWER WITH NO STAR ATTRACTIONS

REF: 2008 BERLIN 1561

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Jeffrey Rathke for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Kicking off its election campaign, the Green Party's May 8-10 national convention yielded few surprises and prompted more discussions about the party's relevance in German politics. The party delegates called for a "Green New Deal," which would create one million new jobs through investment in environmental protection, education, and the social sector within the next four years. Keeping its political options open in advance of the parliamentary elections on September 27, the Greens chose not to name a preferred coalition partner. They did, however, exclude their serving as a third party to provide a majority for the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Free Democrats (FDP) in a so-called three party "Jamaica coalition." Cooperation with the Left Party was not dismissed. On U.S. foreign policy, the Greens welcomed President Obama's election, his statements on nuclear arms control initiatives, and new strategies on Afghanistan and Iran. The party specifically called for a withdrawal of all tactical nuclear weapons from Germany and Europe and adopted a special resolution advocating the acceptance of Guantanamo detainees in Germany.

All in all, the Green coalition strategy appears to leave few viable alternatives, and the lack of star power among their leadership casts further doubt on a return to power.

End Summary.

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WHAT IS THE 'GREEN NEW DEAL'?  
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¶12. (C) The dominant theme throughout the party convention was the party's adoption of a "Green New Deal", which focused on climate protection, labor, justice and liberty issues (the concept was actually announced at the November 14-16, 2008, convention in Erfurt - see reftel). The party pledged to create one new million new jobs and fight climate change by investing in renewable energy technologies and emphasizing education reforms. Party delegates adopted plans to increase renewable energy to 40 percent of national consumption by 2020 and called for all energy sources to be renewable by ¶2040. Central to the party's platform is retaining Germany's planned exit from nuclear energy by about 2023. Similar to the SPD, the party also voted to back an hourly minimum wage of 7.5 Euros (\$10) and delegates called for higher taxes for the wealthy, including an increase in the top tax bracket and higher capital gains taxes, coupled with lower welfare contributions for people on low incomes.

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PARTY COALITION ROULETTE  
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¶13. (C) After a heated debate amongst the delegates, the party decided not to express any preference for coalition partners after the September 27 parliamentary elections, emphasizing

instead a program-focused and independent course which would strengthen the influence of Green policies in German society.

The party delegates did not dismiss forming a coalition with the Left Party and the SPD. (Note: The SPD, however, has ruled out forming a coalition with the Left Party. End note.)

The Greens closed the door serving as a third party majority-builder in a CDU coalition with the FDP, a so-called "Jamaica coalition." (Comment: The strategy may limit the Greens to only one option for returning to power at the national level in 2009: an alliance with the SPD and the Free Democrats (FDP) (so-called "traffic light" coalition of red, yellow and green) since polls show the Greens and the SPD falling short of a majority.)

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THE GREEN VIEW OF THE WORLD  
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¶4. (C) Not surprisingly, foreign and security policy played a marginal role at the party convention. The platform text, however, contained positive references to foreign and security policy initiatives advocated by the Obama Administration, including the closing of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, moving toward nuclear disarmament, the new Afghanistan strategy, and addressing Iran. On Guantanamo, the party delegates adopted a special resolution advocating the acceptance of Guantanamo detainees in Germany.

The party praised President Obama's statements on nuclear disarmament initiatives and advocated for the withdrawal of all tactical nuclear weapons from Germany and Europe. In addition, the party called for a more restrictive arms exports policy, including a complete ban of cluster and

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uranium munitions and landmines. On Afghanistan, the Greens called for ending German participation in Operation Enduring Freedom and making future German participation in ISAF missions contingent on a strategy change which focuses more on civilian reconstruction, judicial reforms and police training programs. As stated in the platform, NATO remains the principal foundation for transatlantic security cooperation, although the platform advocates for political reforms within the Alliance so that it can become more effective. The platform endorsed EU membership for Croatia and Turkey and a joint EU seat on the UN Security Council.

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COMMENT  
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¶5. (C) Heading into a complex and long election campaign, the Green Party is in a difficult position as its strong environmental credentials and policies are hijacked by the CDU and SPD. For all the talk about keeping options open, the Green coalition strategy appears to have few viable alternatives. In addition, the two lead election candidates -- Juergen Trittin and Renate Kuenast -- and two party chairpersons -- Cem Oezdemir and Claudia Roth -- are not considered significant personalities -- of the same caliber, for example, as Joschka Fischer, the former Green Party leader and foreign minister under Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (SPD) who did not attend the party convention. Absent an environmental identity and a dynamic political leader, the party's political identity will remain under siege. Renate Kuenast told Focus magazine on May 8: "I am not Joschka Fischer and I don't want to be either...The people aren't looking for a pop star, they're looking for people who think seriously about the future." Yet this lack of star power ambition is precisely the problem. The other lead candidate, Juergen Trittin, is considered charismatic among his own supporters, but he lacks appeal for the broader political center. Although the party faithful enthusiastically welcomed his fiery presentation, it may not be the right stuff for a party struggling to move back into the saddle of government. End comment.

Koenig